



Archdiocese of San Antonio
Most Reverend Gustavo Garcia-Siller



Homily – St. Joseph (Nixon, TX) Centennial Mass
September 15, 2015

It is great to join you for the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the founding of St. Joseph Parish. We didn't have to travel the distance from San Antonio to Nixon by train as they would have in 1915. According to an article written by Bernice Breisford, Mrs. Leona Hill Griffin wrote to Bishop John W. Shaw in 1911. In her letter she pleaded with him to come and look at the land and asked for the privilege of purchasing land that had been found on a main street here. The article chronicles her first encounter with Bishop Shaw when she brought a sizable sum of money to him, asking for permission to buy the land and set in motion the building of a Catholic Church here. When she was told that she did not have quite enough money to allow

the diocese to move forward, she left her 9-month old baby in the care of a community of nuns and literally went up and down San Antonio Streets knocking on doors, attempting to raise the rest she needed. A few years later, Mrs. Griffin and other families from the area realized their greatest hope and in 1915 the church was dedicated in the name of St. Joseph.

I have been inspired by the passion with which those dozen or so founding families worked and prayed so diligently to begin a pilgrimage of faith that has led us to this wonderful day. They traveled on the rough roads around Nixon, to this place where their children would finally be able to receive the sacraments, and together celebrate Mass in a Church of their own. I pray that the same zeal will always motivate the faithful who have inherited the century-old legacy of faith that has been filled with challenges and change.

In an obvious contrast to the humble efforts of the families who built this parish, we read in today's Gospel that the "disciples were

discussing among themselves on the way who was the greatest." After all the teaching Jesus had tried to share with them...after all the signs and wonders...they still did not understand that to encounter Christ and journey with Him is to know that our ambition should only be to use our gifts and talents to serve the poor and those most in need.

Jesus even brought a child into their midst and gave them one more lesson. In Jesus' time, a child had no legal standing. A child needed to be provided everything. A child was helpless without the love and protection of their parents. Jesus told the disciples that in order to embrace Christ, they must place their faith and reliance on the Father for all their needs...like a child.

Jesus was doing all he could to help the disciples to understand everything he had said and done during his time with them on earth. He needed them to understand what their path to the cross would mean in their lives and to the world. Jesus was depending on his

disciples to continue to build God's kingdom after his resurrection and ascension.

The disciples would only understand Christ's death and resurrection at Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was sent to them and to the whole world. Only then did they begin to comprehend the absurdity of their internal competition for greatness. Only then did they begin to understand that their greatness would be measured by their pouring out the sum of their very lives. It was then that they would understand that God's kingdom would be built by all those who would encounter Christ and unselfishly humbly give of themselves for the wellbeing of others.

Inspired by the Holy Spirit, the disciples must have been humiliated by their meaningless competing for power and position in God's Kingdom.

Reflecting on the letter written by Mrs. Griffin, it seems obvious that she did not seek a parish for her own status or position, she asked for a church where her children could receive the sacraments, attend Mass

and encounter Christ. She followed Jesus' example and placed her family at the heart of her prayer. She was an example of selfless discipleship.

Today, we are called to offer our personal gifts, not for selfish gain, for the common good. Our ambition should deepen our love for God and one another, not to draw attention to ourselves. In today's second reading, St. James writes about what happens when we pray to serve our selfish needs: "You ask but do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passion."

In just a couple of days, Pope Francis will arrive in the United States. He will draw crowds by the hundreds of thousands. Millions more will watch him on TV, and follow him in dozens of ways. However, that is not the Holy Father's ambition. Francis, one of the most public of Popes ever, does not seek the adulation of the crowd even though he wants to be with his flock, especially those who are suffering. **He**

consistently proclaims the heart of the Gospel, that our love for God is revealed in our love for one another.

As Pope Francis arrives in the United States, let us not be blinded and deafened by the din of the crowd. Surely the Holy Father will not be untouched by the glare of the media and the price of his notoriety.

However, he is coming not to gain everyone's approval or applause. He is coming with a message. A message that he hopes the world will hear and understand.

The Pope will not be immune to criticism, but that should neither shock nor scandalize us. In the first reading from the book of Wisdom we read how the wicked respond to one who proclaims the truth of God's will. **"He is obnoxious to us; he sets himself against our doings, reproaches us for transgressions of the law..."**

When Pope Francis speaks out against the greed of unjust economic policies and systems; when he gives voice to the voiceless, challenging us to welcome immigrants and refugees, and embrace the stranger

among us, his popularity ratings may fall; when he jolts our environmental conscience to protect and preserve the common home we share, he is accused of taking sides in the strident global political debate. It is clear that Pope Francis understands what is at the end of the road to Jerusalem. He has carried his own cross around the globe, relying on Jesus to walk ahead of him, empowering him to not stumble under the weight of public opinion and the lure of being a celebrity. The source of his strength and ours as Christ's disciples, is reflected in today's Psalm, "Behold, God is my helper; the Lord sustains my life. Freely will I offer you sacrifice."

On this, the centennial celebration of St. Joseph's parish, we are reminded that at times we are not so different from the disciples. Sometimes we hear, but we do not understand; we see, but are blinded to the truth; we give, but only with the hope to receive; we love, but only those who love us back. Pope Francis, speaking of the use of the power of the papacy, provides us with a humble Christlike model to

follow: "True power is service. The pope must serve all people, especially the poor, the weak, and the vulnerable." Let us learn from his example, and from the teaching of Our Lord, so that our lives will be defined by God's love and lead us on a pilgrimage to eternity.